WELFARE OF EX-SERVICEMEN: AN URGENT PROBLEM

By

GENERAL K. M. CARIAPPA (Retd)

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Fifth Edition

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" In times of war—and NOT before,
God And Soldier, all adore :
When wars are over and everything righted,
God is forgot and the soldier slighted".

This is true today as it has been for years in the past. It is the inescapable duty of the serving soldier, sailor and airman to look after the physical security of his civilian countrymen in times of war and in the reverse order in peace time, it is the sacred duty of the civilians to look after the domestic security of the soldier, sailor and airman. This domestic security concerns not only the serving personnel but more so the Ex-Servicemen, including Officers. JCOs, NCOs, Jawans and NCs (E) in the Defence Services.

Today there are some five million persons in the ranks of Ex-Service personnel. I believe these numbers are being increased by about 35,000 annually when serving personnei are released on the termination of their services. So this is an enlarging family : there is no 'birth control' here ! It is, therefore, imperative that everything possible should be done by the Government and the people to look after the welfare and rehabilitation of our Ex-Service personnel.

HIGH MORALE

The happeir and more contented these Ex-Servicemen are, the higher the morale of the serving soldiers, sailors and airmen will be because they know that some day they will also become Ex-Servicemen. If they know when they are in service that they will not be a "forgotten army" when they leave, they will give their very best and will be prepared to make personal sacrifices including the supreme sacrifice of being prepared to give their lives in war so that their countrymen can live in peace.

Ex-Servicemen of today are not all very happy-with their lot in life. There are some important matters which are causing this discontent and unhappiness in their minds and there are :

1) **Inadequate pensions**
2) **Re-employment in Public and Private Sectors.**
3) **Education of their children and orphans.**
4) **Welfare of widows and dependents.**

These are all matters which ought to be set right soon and can be put right if immediate action is taken by the authorities concerned. It is in this context, I make these recommendations to higher authorities-to act and act soon.

1. SET UP A PENSION COMMISSION :

I strongly feel, a Pension Commision should be set up as early as possible to look into the pensions of all Ex-Service personnel of all ranks. In many cases the scale of pensions is very small. With the cost of living increasing sky-high, these Ex-Servicemen find it very hard to make "both ends meet" in these domestic life. In England, Canada and Australia and some other countries, I believe, pensions of Ex-Servicemen have been revised and raised considerably, two or three times in the last four years.

I know the financial resources of the country are not unlimited. Our Government has many major projects to spend money on but I feel this particular obligation of the State i.e. to provide for the welfare and rehabilitation of Ex-Servicemen of all ranks, is much more important than anything else because unless the morale of our Defence Services personnel, Officers and others, is high, the physical security of our country cannot be assured, for, high morale is a big factor, a very big one, to win battles in wars.

2. A COMMITTEE OF SENIOR OFFICERS OF THREE SERVICES :

Such a Committee should go round India to feel the pulse of Ex-Servicemen widows, orphans dependents and so on. It can more effectively (and with much more understanding) appreciate the problems than any other kind of committee can, because the Members of the Committee themselves have been through the various phases in their Service life. They know what is wanted and what is not. They should be given a directive by the Ministry of Defence to find out the root causes of the reported discontentment amongst Ex-Servicemen and make suggestions on how to redress them. Selected senior retired officers should be invited to go round the country and address at Ex-Services rallies.

3. EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE :

Today the Ex-Servicemen have to stand in long 'queues' at the Employment Exchange offices for their turn, to be considered for recomendations for employment. Often their cases are reported to be subordinated to the cases of other cadres of people who demand special privileges as a reward for their political services. I recommend there should be a separate Employment Exchange Cell for Ex-Servicemen throughout the country.

4. EMPLOYMENT :

Many civilian organisations turn down applications of Ex-Services people on the grounds of 'over age', forgetting that they have given 10, 15, 20 years of the best part of their lives in the service of the country to defend the physical security of the Nation. There should be special concessions in regard to age limits in so far as they affect the Ex-Service personnel with requisite qualifications and experience.

5. PRE-RELEASE TRAINING :

All ranks should be given some practical training during the last six months of their active service, in one of the following at their respective Regimental/Corps Centres.

a) **Motar Transport and Radio maintenance and repairs**
b) **Maintenance and repairs of the various agricultural implements and machinery.**
c) **Modern methods of agriculture, cattle breeding, poultry keeping, bee keeping.**

These training centres can be opened in some parts of the country now to cater for Ex-Servicemen too.

The discontentment which seems to be spreading today may tempt some "hot-headed" young disgruntled persons to take the "hit in their mouth" and organise what is fashionably called "protest marches", to higher authorities to focus their attention on their neglected lot in life.

This kind of "protest marches" certainly will not be permitted by any Senior Ex-Service Officers. When there are so many people in other Governmental and private organisations resorting to these "protest marches" to get their grievances redressed and invariably 'get away with it' we cannot possibly rule out such marches laid on by disgruntled Ex-Servicemen too.

This is a matter which must be prevented at all costs because they will have a damaging effect on the descipline in the Services and this is very dangerous. Recruitment mahy suffer as a result.

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It is therefore, necessary in the reverse order that their interests as serving and ex-serving Personnel must be properly looked after equally loyally. If something on the lines suggested is not done soon, anti-social elements will undoubtedly "capitalise" on this issue and may not miss the opportunity of embarrassing the Government, thereby endangering the security of our Motherland by inciting disgrun-tled Ex-Servicemen to emulate "Strikers", "Marchers", of other Governmental and business concerns and organising their "protest marches" to have their voices heard by the authorities. This is a very serious matter.

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I strongly feel, a Pension Commision should be set up as early as possible to look into the pensions of all Ex-Service personnel of all ranks. In many cases the scale of pensions is very small. With the cost of living increasing sky-high, these Ex-Servicemen find it very hard to make "both ends meet" in these domestic life. In England, Canada and Australia and some other countries, I believe, pensions of Ex-Servicemen have been revised and raised considerably, two or three times in the last four years.

I know the financial resources of the country are not unlimited. Our Government has many major projects to spend money on but I feel this particular obligation of the State i.e. to provide for the welfare and rehabilitation of Ex-Servicemen of all ranks, is much more important than anything else because unless the morale of our Defence Services personnel, Officers and others, is high, the physical security of our country cannot be assured, for, high morale is a big factor, a very big one, to win battles in wars.

2. A COMMITTEE OF SENIOR OFFICERS OF THREE SERVICES :

Such a Committee should go round India to feel the pulse of Ex-Servicemen widows, orphans dependents and so on. It can more effectively (and with much more understanding) appreciate the problems than any other kind of committee can, because the Members of the Committee themselves have been through the various phases in their Service life. They know what is wanted and what is not. They should be given a directive by the Ministry of Defence to find out the root causes of the reported discontentment amongst Ex-Servicemen and make suggestions on how to redress them. Selected senior retired officers should be invited to go round the country and address at Ex-Services rallies.

3. EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE :

Today the Ex-Servicemen have to stand in long 'queues' at the Employment Exchange offices for their turn, to be considered for recomendations for employment. Often their cases are reported to be subordinated to the cases of other cadres of people who demand special privileges as a reward for their political services. I recommend there should be a separate Employment Exchange Cell for Ex-Servicemen throughout the country.

4. EMPLOYMENT :

Many civilian organisations turn down applications of Ex-Services people on the grounds of 'over age', forgetting that they have given 10, 15, 20 years of the best part of their lives in the service of the country to defend the physical security of the Nation. There should be special concessions in regard to age limits in so far as they affect the Ex-Service personnel with requisite qualifications and experience.

5. PRE-RELEASE TRAINING :

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